

## Western Region Essay Winner

*Katy Richardson  
Gate City High School  
Scott County*

Once when we were on a family vacation, we stopped at a convenience store. Two little girls, poorly dressed, tried to buy some food but didn't have enough money. My mother reached in her pocket and gave the clerk fifty cents. The girls' face lit up when they realized a stranger cared. What are you doing with your pocket change? I want mine to make a difference!

This is why Thomas Cannon inspires me. He was a "working man's philanthropist" who, over his lifetime, had only a modest income as a postal worker. He lost his father at a young age. His childhood home had no electricity or running water. Yet, his childhood financial needs nurtured sensitivity. His life experiences empowered him to give sacrificially. We can all benefit from the power of giving.

My older brother's life was touched by an elderly man who created a college scholarship by picking up aluminum cans. This gentleman understood how little acts add up. So, I know that by simple acts like picking up aluminum cans or collecting pocket change I can make a difference. I am a teenager, but I can sponsor a scholarship. I can feed a homeless man or clothe an orphan. I can make people visible.

I have other deeply personal reasons for giving, too. There were times when I needed help and didn't receive any. I needed a friend, but I was alone. I needed a relationship with my dad, but instead I felt isolated. The only person I felt who was there for me was my mom. Unfortunately, some people don't even have that; they need someone like Thomas Cannon to encourage them and make them feel special. Cannon understood giving can also make people feel like their life is appreciated and their efforts applauded. Loud applause is needed in our world. I can give that applause, too, by giving sacrificially.

Overall, giving isn't about a higher figure in a bank account. Giving is a calling, according to Thomas Cannon. It is about having a sacrificial spirit. This why I have joined the U.S. Army Reserves as a high school senior. I know how important it to give sacrificially. Now, here is the real question. The question is not: How can I afford to give? Rather, I ask: How can I afford not to give? Today is my day to make a difference. Follow my lead!